

### **III ASSESSMENT OF FUTURE NEEDS**

#### **DDS**

- The only federal legislation that could have a possible effect on DDS operations would be the recently passed Medicare Act. It has not yet been fully interpreted, but the state agency must be aware that this could very well result in increases to their workloads as it could include that a disability decision be made on all applications for Medicare. An increase in claims for disability decisions would also result in the need for additional staffing.
- There are also some anticipated regulatory changes from SSA that will impact DDS operations. The Commissioner of SSA recently published her “Commissioner’s Approach” to disability claim processing. This “approach” included the centralization of medical consulting (one national medical consulting group) which would impact the need for staffing local DDSs with state agency consultants. The approach also included the possibility of staffing the DDSs with nurses who would act as “local medical consultants”. These changes could represent a shift in the type of workforce and could impact the professional status of analysts.
- SSA’s proposed changes in claims processing will require a significant adjustment from a partially automated system to a totally electronic environment for the entire DDS staff. It will also require an adjustment in management skills for supervisors. Since there will be no paper records to reference, the new process will require that all medical review, adjudication and supervisory review be done in electronic format. Training in new skill sets will be arranged and conducted by a coordinated effort between SSA and DDS.
- DDS has already added 5 new IT positions during the past year. And the new claims processing strategy will, most likely, require additional staff in this area. Since IT personnel are considered by SSA to be part of DDS “overhead”, the additional staffing will impact on SSA productivity indicators.

## **FRS**

- Approximately 30% of current consumers are students in transition. Historically counselors became involved with students in their senior year of high school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act encourages much earlier involvement and suggests that there is a role for the VR counselor as early as at age 14. The Rehabilitation Services Administration, our federal partner, places a high priority on serving students in transition and emphasizes the need for earlier involvement. As a result, school caseloads are growing and consumers are remaining on caseloads longer. This has an impact on the amount of manpower resource that must be devoted to school caseloads. If the emphasis on transition continues as it is expected to, demand for additional school counselors can be expected.
- A critical factor currently impacting the FRS Division is the lack of funding needed to serve all eligible consumers. Projections suggest a serious shortfall in funds for the FY05 VR budget year. Clearly we cannot operate as we have, serving the number of consumers we have with this significant shortfall. One immediate strategy to be employed July 1, 2004 is to enter Order of Selection. Federal law requires state VR programs to take this step whenever they anticipate that there will be insufficient funds to serve all eligible consumers. Order of Selection requires that the agency identify priority categories that are based on the significance of the disability and the functional limitations associated with the disability. The priority for service must be given to individuals with the most significant disabilities. This will be a radical step for service delivery staff as it will create a waiting list and will deny services to consumers who have been determined eligible.
- Under Order of Selection the program will downsize as consumers in closed categories must wait until funds are available to serve additional categories. Since the VR program will continue to serve cases in which an Employment Plan has been developed, expenditures will not decrease immediately. That leaves FRS with some difficult choices for living within a significantly reduced budget.

- Long-range challenges have to do with implementation of Workforce Investment Act programs and services. Consolidation of employment and training services under one authority remains a serious concern to the VR program. For certain, we will be called upon to increase support for local One-Stop service centers with personnel and infrastructure funding. This comes at a time when we can ill afford to divert VR funding which we already anticipate will be insufficient to support current programming.
- What is in store for VR program in the future? It is likely that there will be increased pressure to partner with public and private entities. Co-location and telecommuting will be considerations that will help to reduce administrative costs and offer options that will help to attract and retain workers. Demand for VR services is not likely to decrease. Funding is not likely to increase dramatically. FRS will continue to be confronted with the requirement to do more with less, to maintain program accessibility and to emphasize consumer choice in all service decisions. There will be a continued emphasis on partnerships and sharing of resources with community partners.
- Some employees will not meet the standards for qualified rehabilitation professionals by 2008. Retirement will be an option for some of these counselors and evaluators. Our challenge will be to find ways to engage valued employees in work that is productive and satisfying if we are to retain them. We have recently examined the responsibilities of placement counselors and have determined that these counselors do not perform the functions that are specifically required of a qualified rehabilitation professional. Additionally, 12 contract placement counselor positions have been filled successfully by individuals who do not necessarily meet the CSPD standards. We have revised the qualifications on the EWP's for placement counselors to allow some flexibility in hiring qualified applicants who may not meet the CSPD standards.

- FRS has an antiquated Client Information System. There are many user friendly features that could provide additional support to all field staff that are simply not available in the current VRIS system. Efforts are underway to evaluate bids for a replacement system. Once a proposal is accepted, there will be many months of design and testing before it will be rolled out. A massive training effort will be required. In the meanwhile, staff use a cumbersome system that is inefficient and difficult to learn and use.